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AUTHOR Hunt, Russell A.
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ABSTRACT

Most methods of literary analysis operate at so high a level of abstraction that the basic meaning is obscured. In the classroom the temptation is to ignore the physical text and to focus attention and discussion on secondary issues which arise out of the text. A distinction needs to be made between reading literature and interpreting or analyzing it. Exercises should be developed to help students perceive, comprehend, and then interpret the text. Reading a passage aloud, the use of context cues, and cloze procedure are some of the techniques that can be used to help students perceive the meaning of a text. The more cues available, the easier the reading is. Teachers need to reinforce the role of the reader as an active participant in the creation of meaning and to emphasize that what the reader brings to the transaction with the text is as important as what the text itself brings. (HOD)

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Russell A. Hunt
Department of English
St. Thomas University
Fredericton, New Brunswick E3B 5G3
Canada

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LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE:

REESTABLISHING THE CONNECTION

Some Exercises

Translate each of the following sentences into idiomatic, conversational modern English prose. Do them rapidly; attempt all four.

Here is an example to make clearer what I have in mind:

ORIGINAL: Well then, now
Have you consider'd of my speeches? know
That it was he, in the times past, which held you
So under fortune, which you thought had been
Our innocent self?

TRANSLATION: _____

1. ORIGINAL: He can report,
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt The newest state.

TRANSLATION: _____

2. ORIGINAL: The man the boy the nurse saw met smiled.

TRANSLATION:

3. ORIGINAL: Happy the man whom this bright court approves,
His Sovereign favours, and his Country loves.

TRANSLATION: _____

4. ORIGINAL: Gilbert shall live, till loadstones cease to draw,
Or British fleets the boundless ocean awe.

TRANSLATION: _____

(For the second part, on p.2, please fill in each of the seven blanks with a word which seems to you appropriate.)

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VIRTUE

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky;
The dew shall weep they _____ tonight,
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue ___ _____ and brave
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye;
Thy root is ever in its grave,
And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet _____ and _____,
A box where sweets compacted lie;
My music shows ye have your closes,
And _____must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like _____ _____, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives.

--Geroge Herbert

Unless I am very wrong, you will have found yourself at least momentarily confused by some of those sentences--quite likely you're still having some difficulty with one or two. Part of the reason I am beginning with this exercise is that it seems to me easy for teachers of literature to lose sight of the complexity of the task we regularly require of our students. It's a useful exercise to put ourselves in their position occasionally, to feel a bit of their frustration.

Some years ago, Stanley Fish pointed out that, in literary criticism, "most methods of analysis operate at so high a level of abstraction that the basic data of the meaning experience [he means the literal experience of interacting with the text] is slighted and/or obscured."[1] This happens in the classroom as well, and it happens for at least a couple of

reasons. One is that virtually all literature teachers were taught how to do criticism rather than how to read literature; the other is that encountering knots like the ones I have presented you with can be embarrassing. We --and our students--can always find something to say about themes and images. We--but not our students, usually--can always find something to say about literary history or the theory of genre or form or the biography of the author. But it's dangerous to come down to the basic, concrete level, the level of what we might call language processing. For one thing, usually answers are either right or wrong. It's very difficult to fudge on a pronoun reference or the object of a verb. For these and other reasons, the temptation is very strong in the classroom to ignore the physical text and to focus attention and discussion on secondary issues which arise out of that text. But there is a fundamental problem here: if you and I have not had the same (or very similar) experiences of the text, the discussion will be bedevilled by the fact that we're not discussing the same thing. I'm not talking about differing interpretations here, I'm talking about differing perceptions. If what I see is a lilac bush and what you see is an elm tree, our argument about the grandeur or power or beauty or importance of what we've seen is not likely to produce agreement--it's not even likely to produce fruitful and useful disagreement.

What it will produce is something most students have come to think of as the characteristic product of the literature classroom: fudge. The more general the terms of approbation we use, the more metaphorical they are, the more they're really statements about us rather than about the object in question, the more we're likely to be able to find ways to agree on what we're saying in the presence of that lilac bush and elm tree. In this way, our conversation becomes a lesson in the generation of clever-sounding but meaningless language. Fudge.

One way to phrase the reason for this is to say that it happens because literature teachers don't know anything about language, and don't think they need to know anything about language. We almost always call English departments "departments of language and literature," but usually (as Ronald Baker made clear last spring in Montreal and is making clear elsewhere at this meeting) language is given mighty short shrift. There is, of course, a perfectly clear reason for this: most literature teachers absorbed a profound contempt for the sort of thing linguistics has to say about literature during their undergraduate and graduate careers. In my memory, what linguistics had to say about literature usually amounted to a triumphantly elaborate restatement of the excruciatingly obvious. I remember studies of the number of left-branching sentences in Whitman or of the preponderance of simple sentences in William Carlos Williams or Hemingway. We New-Critically trained literary types were concerned with

larger matters: the aesthetic structure of poems and careers, patterns of imagery, the nature of irony, explications de textes.

The results of all that noble interest in larger matters, however, have been generally unfortunate. Students who can't read--let's phrase that a little more charitably. Students who have profoundly important things still to learn about reading don't learn them in our classes. Students who can read find the skill unnecessary (and occasionally a handicap) in our classes. Classes in literature become bull sessions dialing with historical patterns or abstract ideas or pop-psych self-discovery, and while they may be lots of fun for our students (and may occasionally do them some good) they don't produce readers of literature. We all know ~~of~~ about the sterling honours graduate in English who, a few years after graduation, reads nothing but the daily paper and his paperwork. We all know ~~of~~ about the English major who reads nothing at all that isn't required. And we know ~~of~~ about all the students who take the required English (if there is any) unwillingly and whose hostility to extended passages of print dominates our society.

It seems clear to me that our students learn to avoid literature because avoiding literature is what we teach best. And I think, perhaps paradoxically, that a little attention to language--particularly to some things that have

been learned about language in the past decade or two--is the way to direct our attention, and that of our students, back to literature and away from all these secondary matters.

Let me begin explaining what I mean by making some distinctions. They may seem obvious and not all of them will seem immediately relevant, but I think they're all necessary. It's particularly important, I think, for us to keep these distinctions clear in the literature classroom--and particularly in the introductory classroom.

A fundamental distinction, which we all know but which we tend to forget, is the one between knowing a language and knowing <u>about</u> a language. We remember this one best in the context of writing instruction, where study after study has shown that teaching information about the grammar of English has absolutely no effect on students' ability to write the language. We probably should, however, know it even better from our own experience (and, incidentally, from work in developmental psycholinguistics like that of Roger Brown[2]): children learn more grammar in the first two or three years of their lives than we would be able to teach them <u>about</u> in fifty. This is, of course, partly because we don't yet understand discursively much of what all children can <u>do</u> with language. This distinction is as important to reading as it is to speaking or writing: the reason we have trouble de-

coding passages like some of the ones I have given you is not that we don't know the theory of clause formation or how to conjugate English pronouns.

A related--and perhaps even more fundamental--distinction is that between language and grammar. When you urge literature teachers to learn more about language, most assume you mean grammar, but of course that isn't necessarily true. The study of language includes many areas that go well beyond grammar and, in my view, come before grammar. I'm referring to speech-act theory, for instance, and discourse analysis, and psycholinguistics. It is in areas like these that the ideas most directly relevant to the teaching of liteature are being developed, and for the teacher not to know something about them is as though a Renaissance cosmologist were to remain resolutely ignorant of the telescope and the discoveries it enabled.

A third distinction--perhaps more directly and obviously relevant to the literature classroom--is that between reading literature and interpreting or analysing or criticising it. In theory, of course, it is obvious that reading must come first, but in practice we tend to ingore this fact, to assume that interpretation and response and analysis are all part of one undifferentiated process. And in some ultimate sense, of course, that's true; but it is an extremely useful technique to divide the process into differ-

ent stages. George Dillon offers a clear description of one way of dividing it.[3] He says that there are three basic levels of reading: perception, comprehension, and interpretation.

Perception is most basic, and involves specifying the propositional structure of a sentence. Noam Chomsky would call this, I think, the "deep structure" of the sentence; another way to phrase it might be to say it involves finding the propositional core of the sentence. Theoretically, if a sentence has been perceived, the perceiver should be able to restate or rephrase it accurately.

The second level, comprehension, involves "the integration of [the sentence's] propositional content into one's running tally of what is being described or argued in the passage." This includes activities like identifying individuals or objects referred to, or inferring relations which are not stated explicity, but which are immediate. This tends to involve larger units than the sentence, and to require the reader to make more elaborate inferences and connections--to bring more to the process, in other words.

And finally, at the level of interpretation, we "relate the sense of what is going on to the author's constructive intention--why he is saying what he says, or what he is getting at in terms of the themes and meaning of the work."

At this final level, we begin to more toward what most of us think of as "response" or "analysis" or--in traditional

literary terms--"interpretation." Only at this point do we begin to move toward criticism, to take up a stance less analogous to that of a friend in a conversation and more analogous to that of a psychoanalyst, listening not exclusively in order to understand "what's being said," but listening also for other patterns, for things underneath "what's being said."

Now, bearing those distinctions in mind, let me take a look at what happened when I gave one of those sentences from the exercise sheet to some of my freshmen. (I should say to begin with that the large majority of them had great difficulty with it, and I want to try to avoid demeaning them in dealing with their paraphrases. There is a great temptation here to see their errors as risible or them as particularly inept readers. It is my conviction that they are <u>not</u> particularly inept--rather, they represent the norm we tend to ignore--and that we have much to learn by paying serious attention to their attempts to deal with a difficult probelm in trying circumstances. My model in this, by the way, is the sort of attitude Mina Shaughnessy brought to her basic writers at City College in her <u>Errors and Expectations</u>.)

The sentence I would like to begin with is the one from <u>Macbeth</u>, numbered "one" on the sheet. I would expect that not many people here will have had trouble with it, even out of its context in the play, because the problems

it presents are fairly straightforward matters of diction and tinkering with normal phrase order. The reason I begin with it, in fact, is that I was so surprised that so many of my students--all of them had read Macbeth, and many had had it in high school a year or two before as well--were simply not able to make out the sense of the sentence. They couldn't, in Dillon's terms, perceive it. Or, at any rate, they couldn't write an accurate restatement or paraphrase of it.

Some of their difficulty in doing this may be due to the tension involved in its being a classroom exercise. Even though no mark was given, many of them come under a good deal of pressure any time they must commit themselves to something in class. And, as well, some of the difficulty may be due not to reading problems but to writing ones; some, having understood the sentence well enough, may have found it difficult to convey that understanding. I don't believe, however, that either of these explanations can have had a serious or profound effect on the results.

Looking at the paraphrases I have received over the past two years, it seems to me I can identify a number of different kinds of problems the students seemed to have. In some cases the problem was panic pure and simple. It is possible that outside the context of a class some of these students might have done marginally better, but we are dealing with a vicious circle here: the more the student's experience

convinces him that literature is not accessible to his skills, the more he's likely to panic when confronted with specific demands like this. Some of them simply gave up and didn't turn in a paper at all. Others gave up in effect:

> 1. He tells us, because of his problem, because of the war The present problem is at hand.
>
> 2. He can report, as seen by his view, of the war, just recently
>
> 3. He can report. As the way he look when he came from the battle. Whene he came from the place of the battle

The power of this panic, and the possibility that it underlies many of the specific errors my students made, should not be ignored. To some extent it is unavoidable, of course: but it is a part of the teaching sitution that is particularly inimical to the teaching of literature. One should not associate the reading of literature with this kind of panic --and yet, in my experience, most students do. For many it never wears off.

More specifically, some of the students seem to have had trouble with diction. Words which are not part of their daily experience include "plight" and "seemeth," and both of them gave trouble.

> 4. He can tell us since he was there, about the fighting in the new state.
>
> 5. He can say,
> As experience by his life, of the events
> That are about to happen.
>
> 6. He can tell, by his observation, about the revolt (fight) which his country is engaged in

The phrase "as seemeth by his plight" is apparently opaque

to many of these students, and what they often tend to do is precisely what they ought to do in that case--use context to suggest something that ought to be there. "Since he was there," "As experience by his life," and "by his observation" all make some minimal kind of sense in this context. Each of these students is doing what we know readers ought to do--forming a hypothesis about what to expect. They have some difficulty testing it against the page, but as readers they are probably in a more hopeful condition than the ones who simply left the phrase out:

> 7. He is supposed to report what happened to him, and warn the king of the revolt.
>
> 8. he can SAY, what he saw of the Revolt

Equally serious problems are posed by the inversion of normal syntax. I have no evidence of this, but I am certain that had the students been confronted with "the newest state of the revolt" instead of "of the revolt the newest state," virtually none would have taken "state" to mean a political entity as opposed to a condition. In fact, however, there were more problems with this inversion than with "seemeth" and "plight."

> 4. He can tell us since he was there, about the fighting in the new state.
>
> 9. They can report, as it seems to be by his plight, the revolt of the newest state.
>
> 10. By the looks of him (his battered condition); he should be able to tell us how the revolt in the new state is going.
>
> 11. He can tell us, as to what has happened of the uprising of the newest state.

12. He can tell us now, as he seems ready, of the revolt from the state.

All of these involve reading "state" as political and attempting to make some sort of connection between that and "revolt." Some, however, seem simply to have hit a brick wall:

13. He can tell, by his victor, that the revolt will bring him power.

14. He can tell us exactly, by his apparent involvement, of the revolt of the peasants or whatever.

Over the past two years, approximately a third of my freshmen have produced paraphrases or translations of that sentence that I have been prepared to call accurate. By "accurate," incidentally, I do not mean either perfect or grammatically correct; I mean a paraphrase which it seems to me could not have been produced unless the student had, in Dillon's terms, "perceived" the sentence. Here are two:

15. The bloody (wounded) soldier can tell us how the battle is going & what's happening because he was just there. The newest state is the new conditions of the revolt, (war).

16. He can tell us, He seems like he has been in the battle, of the revolt who is winning now

Now what I find surprising here is not my students' ignorance, but my own. I have been teaching literature for more than fifteen years, and it would not have occurred to me that so many university freshmen would have trouble on this level with a sentence so relatively simple--or, at least, so common. Sure, I knew that Shakespeare's language poses problems for freshmen--after all, it poses problems

for Shakespeare scholars. And probably none of us pass by in silence a knot like "If it were done when 'twere done, then 'twere well it were done quickly." However, a line like the one in question never draws that kind of attention. And yet it represents the warp on which the play is woven; I do not see how someone who cannot paraphrase it can be said to have perceived the play, or on what basis he can be expected to discuss it.

Still, many of my students were perfectly prepared--even eager--to engage in discussion. They wanted to talk about whether Macbeth is a tragedy, whether Macbeth himself is a tragic hero, whethe Lady Macbeth or he is primarily responsible for the catastrophe--even more, about patterns of imagery and Shakespeare's view of kingship and the functions of the soliloquy. And what they really loved were discussions of the similarities between Macbeth's problems and their own, or between Elizabethan political problems and modern ones. True, these discussions tended to get pretty theoretical pretty quickly, but it had never occurred to me how profoundly they depended on never, never stating any of the specific, concrete qualities of the lilac bush or oak tree ostensibly under discussion. It had not occurred to me how thoroughly they were exercises in the skillful generation of fudge.

In broad outline, then, that is the problem I think we face. I imagine it will come as no surprise to find that I

think the first steps down the road toward a solution lie in learning more about language--and specifically, and most immediately, about the process by which we read. I do not mean to suggest that we should convert "Introductory Literature" into "The Psycholinguistics of Reading"; here as elsewhere, what we need to know in order to teach is not the same as what we teach. But I do think that an imaginative as well as intellectual understanding of what it is our students are doing when they confront a text will allow us to find ways to help them engage themselves with it.

I don't want to make any attempt to pass myself off as an expert in these matters. I am a literature teacher, not a linguist or a psycholinguist or a philosopher of language or a semiotician. In a couple of years of dilletantish reading, however, I have learned so much of value to my literature teaching that I do not have time here to do more than indicate a couple of directions in which I think that value lies.

Two books concerned with the reading process seem particularly stimulating to me. One I have already referred to; it is George Dillon's Language Processing and the Reading of Literature: Toward a Model of Comprehension.[4] The other is Frank Smith's Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read.[5] Dillon most directly, and Smith to a lesser extent, puts the reader in the position where he has to consciously confront problems in language

processing. Most literature teachers do this processing so quickly and so intuitively that we're not conscious of it as a process at all--we tend, after all, to be people who were successfu. in English classes, and one is successful in English classes largely because he's a proficient, and therefore an intuitive, reader. Reading Dillon is a remarkably effective way to make yourself aware of the difficulties less skillful readers have. Smith's focus is quite different, but he too directs your attention to the process. More clearly than any writer I know of, he shows just what's involved in the process, and especially in the process of learning how to do it. Neither book has much to say directly about the teaching of literature, but both generate ideas and insight.

Let me suggest a few of the things they have generated for me. Here's one. Reading aloud in class, at any level, is not fashionable. It's often regarded as self-indulgent or lazy (it's so slow and inefficient, people say, and it doesn't take any preparation. Aren't you really just killing time?) And yet even a quick glance at Frank Smith's book--or, better, at any five-year-old who is actually learning to read--will show you that the way kids learn to read is by being read to, by seeing reading as a whole activity. And it's equally clear that the best way to help a student process a sentence (to perceive it) is to read it aloud with some life and imagination. Take as an example the second sentence on the sheet I handed out. Unless you already knew the trick,

I'll bet that it gave you a fair bit of trouble. It's an example of triple embedding, and it actually does follow the rules of English, though I can't imagine the circumstances under which it might occur--other than as a horrible example. But it's a good exercise because it's just as opaque to most people when they first see it as "as seemeth by his plight" was to many of my freshmen. And explanations of it using the jargon of grammatical analysis are no help at all--at least it was no help to me when someone told me it was triply embedded.

And explanations which depend on expanding it may not be much more help. "The man who was seen by the boy whom the nurse met smiled" is a little more comprehensible, but most people are still not sure that it represents the same proposition as the original. They need something more, some way of making the connection between the two. What seems to work much better for many people is to use pitch, speed, and pauses to convert the sentence into speech:

Theman the boy the nurse saw met smiled.

There are problems with this, as there are with any kind of interpretation. Students who are not used to structures this complex may also lack the skill of decoding complicated syntax from sound cues because of lack of practice--certainly no sentence like that has ever occurred in a Midas Muffler commercial. But most problems they will encounter are nowhere near that complicated; the line from Macbeth, for instance,

can be fairly readily unraveled by the use of the same devices:

He can report as seemeth by his plight
oftherevoltthe newest state

Even more important, I think, than the actual information conveyed about the sentence's structure is the conveying of the conviction, the confidence, that the utterance really does make sense. This confidence is absolutely fundamental to competent, fluent reading, and I think it is clear that many of our students simply don't have it.

Another way of building this confidence is suggested by considering what Dillon and Smith have to say about what it is we do as we read. Find a text which the students do have the ability to process, and stop their reading at some point (almost any point will do), and investigate just how sophisticated what they are already doing is--because, of course, it is unimaginably complicated, even for fairly primitive readers.

Look at the third sentence on the sheet, for instance. I suspect no one will have had serious trouble with it. If you stop after the first line and ask yourself who approves of what, it's clear that the answer lies in the fact that the pronoun is inflected: it's "whom" and not "who." (To avoid getting into terminological difficulties, one might offer the class the alternative: "Happy the man who this bright court approves," and see whether they find the sentence as

ambiguous as I do.) It's also clear that the next line continues the parallel and thus continues the same object for the verb: "/whom/ his Sovereign favours, and /whom/ his country loves." One of our central problems is convincing our students that they do have some grammatical competence that they can trust, even though they may not have much grammatical information.

Another complication which is perhaps even more central might be called the theme of Smith's book: it is that skilled readers don't work from words up to meanings, but rather from meanings down to words. Smith's argument (I am oversimplifying shamelessly here) is that in skilled reading there simply is not time for us to see all the graphic cues, and that therefore what we do is to form a hypothesis, an expectation of what's coming, and then check that against the text. The more cues available to us to do this sort of anticipating and predicting, the easier the reading is. Most texts offer a great deal of redundancy in their cues--that is, there is more than one way of predicting what's coming or assembling the whole into a unity. It's my guess that there is characteristically more redundancy--and more different kinds of redundancy--in "literary" texts than in expository ones (theorists of reading don't deal with literature very much, so for the time being that has to remain a guess).

The most obvious example of this redundancy is a nonsense poem like "Jabberwocky," where the grammatical sense

--as well as a good deal of information about the "plot" --is available to us even though a large percentage of the words don't mean anything at all. Indeed, research conducted by means of a "cloze procedure"--whereby gaps are left in a piece of prose and the subjects asked to fill them--has suggested that a surprisingly high percentage of words must be eliminated before meaning becomes inaccessible.

What all of this means is what most of us already know: if you're relaxed and confident enough, context will tell you what almost anything means--has to mean--whether you can process it or not. This has a good deal of significance for the teaching of literature. One thing it means is that students should be encouraged to do what some of my freshmen did with "as seemeth by his plight"--that is, to figure out what sort of thing the phrase ought to say. That kind of guessing is the lifeblood of reading, and we should find ways to give them practice in it. Even more, we should find ways to convince them that guessing--even wrong guessing; even especially wrong guessing--is a basic and important tool. (This notion is very strongly reinforced by the work of Kenneth and Yetta Goodman on miscue analysis of beginning readers. They make the point that some errors--those based on the construction of meanings--are far more hopeful signs than others.[6])

One way of giving our students practice in this sort

of guessing is to make a game of eliminating words or phrases or lines from literature and discussing what sorts of things can be known about the empty space, on the basis of cues like grammar, scansion, syntax, tone, diction, plot, and so forth. One result of this is that our attention becomes focussed on what Dillon would call "comprehension" and "perception" of the passage and away from the larger, more traditionally "literary" and abstract matters--the ones which tend to produce lots of fudge.

Consider, for instance, the "altered" version of George Herbert's "Virtue" I have handed out. I have eliminated many of the words which are most important in creating the structure of the poem; considering the students' attempts to fill those blanks can be very instructive, to them and to me. In the third stanza, for instance, about a third of the students inserted something and "roses." "Roses" is obvious, of course, from the rhyme--but having struck on "roses" at least some of them were able to claw their way back to "days" as the previous word. Now that strikes me as a fairly sophisticated apprehension of poetic form. The student has seen that Herbert is building on the first two stanzas, not merely adding to them. It's not only that the subject of each stanza is more general, but that the subject of the third stanza <u>includes</u> the first two.

But what was perhaps most interesting about this pro-

cess was that as I listed the class's choices on the board, many of the students saw that "roses" had to be right, and then independently went back to the previous blank and saw that it had to be "days." In other words, the process of comprehension had been slowed for them, and they saw <u>for themselves</u>, not because I pointed it out, how the poem's structure worked. As you can see from the list of choices, no one independently got "all" at the end of that stanza, but once the basic principle became clear, lots of people saw that "all" was the necessary word.

There is an interesting point to be made here about the way in which literature relies on the reader to be surprised (that is, to form wrong expectations). In stanza two, there is no way a reader could anticipate "angry" as an adjective used for the colour of a rose, and part of the reader's appropriate response to the word and to the poem is a certain kind of astonishment. The situation in stanza four is similar. In both cases our reading is characterized by surprise and then a search for a justification: how can a rose's hue be angry? How can a soul be like seasoned timber? In each case Herbert answers the question, but the impact--the wit--of the answer depends on the reader's having formed the wrong expectation, been startled, and then asked the question as he read.

One last idea: the fact that there are lines which

only have meaning by virtue of appearing in a certain context, can be used to underline the importance of the reader's contribution to the realization of the poem. In some writers--George Dillon mentions a number who do this habitually and who have deserved reputations for being difficult, like Spenser and Henry James and Faulkner--the grammar and sentence structure often simply don't give us the necessary information to process the text and specify its propositional structure. Often we are forced to rely on what we can see it must say. To some extent, this is true in the fourth sentence I've given you on that sheet; the second line, in terms of its strict grammatical construction, could mean any of a number of things. In terms of what it has to mean for the comparison to make any sense, however, it must be translated "Or till British fleets cease to awe the boundless ocean." It's clear that Dryden is relying on his reader to be demanding--expecting, perceiving--coherence in his utterance.

Reinforcing the idea that the reader is an active participant in the creation of meaning, and that what he brings to the transaction with the text is as important as what the text itself brings, is one of the most valuable byproducts of exercises such as these. It seems particularly important to note that this view of the reader's role arises not only out of the work on the mech-

anics of reading that I am primarily dealing with here, but also out of almost every discipline which concerns itself with language. Literary criticism, for instance, has produced writers like David Bleich and Norman Holland and--especially--Stanley Fish who have begun to turn their attention from the work as an autonomous object to the reader's response to that work. Philosophers of language like J. L. Austin and John Searle and Mary Louise Pratt have developed the notion of the speech-act, which embodies the view that meaning is not something that resides in words and the grammar and syntax that hold them together, but rather in the relation between two people using language.

This amounts, I think, to a gradual but nonetheless radical change in our view of what language is and does, and to a similar change in our attitudes toward literature. As teachers of literature, it not only gives us a warrant to turn our attention from criticism and scholarship back toward the actual relations between our students and the texts we offer them, but also holds out important suggestions as to ways in which we might accomplish this.

It all boils down to this: reading literature is a skill which is <u>learned</u>. Whether it can be <u>taught</u>--even more, whether it can be taught as late as the freshman year in university--hasn't been established yet. In my view, however, the only way we'll ever have a chance at

teaching it is through coming to a clearer understanding of the way language actually works--particularly, the way it works when it's laid out in front of us on a page. I think we have a responsibility to push as hard as we can at an answer to the question whether the skill can be taught: if it can, it's by far the most important think we could possibly do.

APPENDIX

SOME "TRANSLATIONS"

The Original:

He can report,
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt
The newest state.

--Macbeth, I, ii, 1-3

Some "Translations" by university freshmen:

1. He tells us, because of his problem, because of the war The present problem is at hand.
2. He can report, as seen by his view, of the war, just recently
3. He can report. As the way he look when he came from the battle. Whene he came from the place of the battle
4. He can tell us since he was there, about the fighting in the new state.
5. He can say,
   As experience by his life, of the events
   That are about to happen.
6. He can tell, by his observation, about the revolt (fight) which his country is engaged in
7. He is supposed to report what happened to him, and warn the king of the revolt.
8. He can SAY, what hs saw of the Revolt
9. They can report, as it seems to be by his plight, the revolt of the newest state.
10. By the looks of him (his battered condition); he should be able to tell us how the revolt in the new state is going.

11. He can tell us, as to what has happened of the uprising of the newest state.

12. He can tell us now, as he seems ready, of the revolt from the state.

13. He can tell, by his victor, that the revolt will bring him power.

14. He can tell us exactly, by his apparent involvement, of the revolt of the peasants or whatever.

15. The bloody (wounded) soldier can tell us how the battle is going & what's happening because he was just there. The newest state is the new conditions of the revolt, (war).

16. He can tell us, He seems like he has been in the battle, of the revolt who is winning now

SUGGESTIONS FOR FILLING SLOTS IN "VIRTUE"

1. For "fall":	2. For "angry":	3. For "days":
exit	blooms	growths
brow	sensuous	promises
fate	proud	days
birds (?)	strong	sights
forest	bloomed	essence
parting	captivating	sunshine
tears	bold	daisies
death	branches	scent
heart	fiery	scent
pass	grief	love
self	stand (?)	color
ground	fresh	rain
dusk	strong	senses
tears	sublime	days
death	spotless	dews

4. For "roses":	5. For "all":	6. For "seasoned timber":
beauty	thou	Ave Maria's
flowers	thou	mother nature
roses	thou	one's own
sounds	thou	old memories
flowers	nature	winter time
color	tragically	myself included
roses	thou	tallest mountains
roses	thou	sweet honeydew
roses	thou	beating waves
life	days	Egyptian mummies
song	thou	aged wine
rose	thou	mine own
roses	thou	wild evergreen
roses	thou	fiery flames
trees	you	--